

JUL 17 1967

Allen-Scott Report

Bottle Cork Plan Studied

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WASHINGTON — Those friendly overtures that President Johnson sent to Communist China were designed to lessen the tensions building up over Vietnam between the two governments.

The President's message, stating a desire to improve relations, was delivered through Romania's Premier Ion Gheorghe Maurer after Washington and Peking had exchanged stern warnings on expanding the Vietnam war.

In their most recent periodic conference in Warsaw, Peking's diplomats cautioned those from the U.S. that an invasion of North Vietnam by U.S. forces operating near the Demilitarized Zone would bring Chinese troops into the battle.

U.S. diplomats countered with a warning that the continued use of Chinese Communist bases by North Vietnamese fliers could lay those fields open to future U.S. air attacks.

The latter warning resulted from U.S. intelligence estimates that nearly all of North Vietnamese aircraft were now operating from bases inside Communist China.

Since the U.S. began bombing the North Vietnamese Mig air bases at Kep, Hoala, and Kienan, Navy and Air Force reconnaissance pilots reported the Red jets on these fields were moved across the border into southern China.

From this safe haven, the North Vietnamese aircraft have continued "hit and run" attacks against U.S. bombers. These Red attacks have become more successful in recent weeks with the downing of several U.S. planes.

President Johnson so far has refused to permit U.S. fliers to pursue their attackers across the Chinese border. Under White House imposed restrictions, the U.S. pilots must not fly closer than 10 miles of the border.

The question of "hot pursuit" — the permitting of American fliers to chase attackers to their home base — was raised by General William Westmoreland during Defense Secretary McNamara's Vietnam visit. No decision came out of these talks, according to Pentagon insiders, since only President Johnson can authorize a change in policy.

Communist China's warning against a U.S. invasion of southern North Vietnam reportedly stems from the continued U.S. deployment of a Marine amphibian force off the coast near the Demilitarized Zone.

This assault force, consisting of several thousand Marines, was used earlier this year for a successful landing behind enemy forces operating in the southern section of the Demilitarized Zone.

U.S. military authorities regard Peking's warning as an effort by Hanoi to obtain new White House assurances that there will be no landing such as MacArthur executed in Korea behind their 30,000 troops operating in North Vietnam's southern panhandle.

A landing on the coast above Vinh — which is only 35 miles from the western border of North Vietnam in the Annam mountain range — and a quick dash to the mountains would cut off this enemy force now being used to attack across the Demilitarized Zone.

A successful U.S. invasion also would close the Keo Neua and Mugla passes leading to the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, over which most of North Vietnam's supplies go to South Vietnam.

Known as the "cork in the bottle" plan, this military operation was proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to President Johnson several months ago. The President is still studying it along with the latest Peking warning.

Israel's attack on the Liberty, the Defense Department's communication ship knocked out of action during the Middle East fighting, may have been sparked by a Central Intelligence Agency warning to King Hussein of Jordan.

On June 4, the day before the fighting broke out in the Middle East, the CIA warned the young Jordanian king that Israel would launch an attack within 48 hours and the first strike would be against Arab airfields.

Israel intercepted this report when King Hussein relayed it to other Arab leaders, including Egypt's President Nasser, who for reasons of his own discounted the warning.

Instead of passing the information along to his military commanders, Nasser's only known action was to caution Hussein not to undertake any military move which might precipitate an Israel attack at that time.

After monitoring the Hussein-Nasser radio-telephone exchanges Israeli military authorities responded by moving up the hour of their attack against Arab air bases.

Also, an immediate search was ordered by Israeli intelligence to locate a communication ship which was sending coded messages to the U.S. embassy in Amman, Jordan.

The Liberty, which was moving toward the Israeli coast, was located on June 6 by an Israeli reconnaissance plane. After several meetings, the Israeli military command decided on June 7 that the ship had to be put out of operation since it was apparently monitoring military communications. The Israeli attack was launched on June 8.